

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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FM AMCONSUL LENINGRAD
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3084
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: CASC, UR
SUBJ: FATE OF TOUR GROUP WHICH INCLUDED DR. GOLDBERGER AND
PROFESSOR WALD

REF: A) MOSCOW 4958 B) STATE 079556 C) LENINGRAD 437

1. MR. JAY SIEGEL, MEMBER OF FINNAIR TROIKA TOUR
WHICH WAS INFORMED ON SATURDAY APRIL 16 THAT THERE
WERE NO HOTEL ACCOMMODATIONS AVAILABLE IN MOSCOW, CALLED
CONGEN AT 1430 MONDAY AFTERNOON (APRIL 18) FROM HOTEL
ASTORIA AND INFORMED CONGENOFF THEIR VISAS TO MOSCOW
HAD BEEN REVOKED MONDAY MORNING.

2. MR. SIEGEL ALSO REPORTED THAT DR. ROBERT GOLDBERGER
AND PROFESSOR GEORGE WALD (MEMBERS OF THE GROUP WHO
HAD INTENDED TO VISIT THE FIFTH ANNIVERSARY SESSION OF
THE MOSCOW REFUSENIKS' SUNDAY SEMINAR) DEPARTED FOR THE
UNITED STATES ON SUNDAY. MR. SIEGEL AND OTHER MEMBERS
OF THE GROUP WERE IN THE PROCESS OF DEPARTING HOTEL TO
CATCH 16:55 FLIGHT TO HELSINKI WHEN HE CALLED. HE
REQUESTED ASSISTANCE EITHER IN GETTING THE VISAS
RESTORED OR OBTAINING REFUND FROM INTOURIST.
SIEGEL NOTED THAT TWO MEMBERS OF GROUP, A MR. AND MRS.
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DONAHUE, WILL REMAIN IN LENINGRAD FOR A FEW DAYS.

3. CONGENOFF CALLED INTOURIST OFFICIAL SOROKOUMOV
WHO HAD DEALT WITH GROUP AND REQUESTED RESTORATION
OF THE VISAS AND HOTEL ACCOMMODATIONS FOR THE GROUP
WHICH HAD BEEN REDUCED IN SIZE BY WALD'S AND
GOLDBERGER'S DEPARTURE. SOROKOUMOV STATED HE HAD

REQUESTED THIS FROM MOSCOW ONCE AGAIN THAT MORNING AND THAT ONCE AGAIN THE DENIAL OF ACCOMMODATIONS AND VISAS WAS CONFIRMED. HE MADE IT CLEAR THE MATTER WAS OUT OF HIS HANDS AND INFORMED CONGEN OFF THAT HE COULD NOT DISCUSS THE MATTER FURTHER ON THE TELEPHONE; THAT CONGENOFF SHOULD COME TO INTOURIST IF HE WISHED TO CONTINUE CONVERSATION.

4. CONGENOFF THEN PRESSED SOROKOUMOV ON THE ALTERNATIVE QUESTION OF THE REFUND. SIEGEL AND GROUP HAD REPORTEDLY BEEN GIVEN, IN LIEU OF REFUND, CERTIFICATES ("SPRAVKI") WHICH FLATLY STATED IN ENGLISH THAT THEY COULD NOT BE REDEEMED AT TRAVEL AGENCIES IN THE UNITED STATES FOR UNUSED PORTION OF TRIP. CONGENOFF CONVEYED AND SECONDED SIEGEL'S DEMAND FOR ON-THE-SPOT CASH REFUND. SOROKOUMOV PROMISED TO CHECK ON POSSIBILITY OF THIS "EXCEPTION" AND INFORM CONGENOFF. SOROKOUMOV COULD NOT BE REACHED AFTER THAT CONVERSATION.

5. WHEN CONGENOFF AGAIN CONTACTED MR. SIEGEL AT ASTORIA SERVICE BUREAU, HE WAS INFORMED INTOURIST AGENT HAD EXCHANGED GREEN CERTIFICATES FOR THE EARLIER CERTIFICATES AND THAT THESE GREEN CERTIFICATES COULD INDEED BE REDEEMED. INTOURIST AGENT WAS ALSO PERSUADED TO GIVE MR. SIEGEL COPY OF THE ORIGINAL AMERICAN EXPRESS VOUCHER WHICH HAD BEEN PURCHASED IN NEW YORK. WITH THIS, SIEGEL PARTY DEPARTED HOTEL FOR AIRPORT AND MAINTAINED CONTACT THERE WITH CONGEN UNTIL DEPARTURE TIME IN HOPES OF LAST MINUTE APPROVAL LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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OF CASH REFUND. CONGENOFF REQUESTED MR. SIEGEL KEEP CONGEN INFORMED OF SUCCESS (OR LACK THEREOF) IN OBTAINING REFUND SO THAT WE MIGHT GIVE WHATEVER ASSISTANCE WE CAN.

6. CONGEN OFF WENT TO INTOURIST HEADQUARTERS THIS MORNING AND WAS MET BY SOROKOUMOV, DEPUTY DIRECTOR LASHENKO, AND THE SIEGEL PARTY'S INTERPRETER. SOROKOUMOV REITERATED THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF OBTAINING FROM MOSCOW AUTHORITIES RESTORATION OF VISAS AND ACCOMMODATIONS FOR SIEGEL PARTY, STRESSED THAT THEY HAD OFFERED THE GROUP EVERY POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVE TO MOSCOW, AND APOLOGIZED FOR THE INCIDENT. SOROKOUMOV NOTED THAT SUCH INCIDENTS HAPPEN, ALBEIT RARELY. HE AND LASHENKO NOTED APROPOS OF THE CERTIFICATES THAT PEOPLE DO MAKE MISTAKES. THEY PROMISED TO TRY ONCE AGAIN TO OBTAIN MOSCOW VISAS AND ACCOMMODATIONS FOR THE DONAHUES SHOULD THEY WISH TO RESUME THEIR TRAVELS THERE.

7. COMMENT: THERE PROBABLY IS, AND WAS, NOTHING
SOROKOUMOV COULD DO, AND HE AND LASHENKO WERE PATENTLY
EMBARRASSED BY THE INCIDENT. CLEARLY ALSO, THE
SIEGEL PARTY GOT A ROTTEN DEAL, AND THEY WILL
PROBABLY INSIST ON FULL REFUND, AS THEY SHOULD,
WHILE INTOURIST PROBABLY WILL ONLY BE WILLING TO MAKE REFUND FOR
UNUSED PORTION OF TRIP. CONGEN IS ATTEMPTING TO CONTACT
DONAHUES TO DETERMINE WHETHER THEY STILL WISH THEIR
MOSCOW VISAS AND ACCOMMODATIONS RESTORED AND TO OFFER
OUR SUPPORT IN THE EVENT THEY DO. END COMMENT.
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